

What I Lost in the War

Small things: pocketknife with three blades,
a good knife, although I'd broken one of the blades.

Cassette of the second Blood, Sweat & Tears
album, purchased on R&R in Sydney—almost
worn out anyway, so not a great loss, and
I could hear “Sometimes in Winter” in my head
anytime I wanted.

Socks. A poncho liner. Packet of pre-rolled joints
I bought from a mama-san on a road near Phu Bai,
but I think they were stolen by Stephenson, that
pothead, so they probably don't count.

Larger things: 35mm camera purchased through
the PX. Bought another camera, but ten years later
lost all the photos I'd taken in Vietnam when my office
burned during a summer fire that swept down
the San Bernardino hills, a brief, hot exhalation
that left the building next door untouched but took
my office to the ground, transformed wood, glass,
floors, typewriters, and all those sentences created
on typewriters into piles of ash and debris.

Lost friends, of course, and abstract things: faith,
certitude, the future. The Army sent me home after
13 months, 10 days before I turned 21, but they
wouldn't release my discharge papers till I turned in
my field jacket—*wouldn't even let me keep the damn
jacket*—couple of weeks before Christmas, 1970.